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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 000654

SIPDIS

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PRM/ANE FOR MELISSA PITOTTI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: TRICKLE OF SRI LANKAN REFUGEES TO INDIA COULD BECOME FLOOD
IF WAR BREAKS OUT IN NORTH

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The flow of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu has steadily declined to less than 200 a month. But the situation could quickly reverse itself: our contacts say that up to 50,000 refugees could arrive in India within a few months if war breaks out in northern Sri Lanka. They are confident India can handle an influx of new refugees but note that it could cause political trouble for Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK party and, by extension, India's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government in New Delhi. END SUMMARY.

REFUGEES ARRIVE IN SMALLER NUMBERS

12. (SBU) According to the Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR), there are a total of 79,772 Sri Lankan refugees registered in camps in India. Arrivals from Sri Lanka have steadily decreased in the past two years, with less than 200 Sri Lankan refugees reaching Indian shores in each of the past few months. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in mid-2006 when thousands landed each month. Figures for monthly refugee arrivals follow:

2006

May:	1456
June:	1770
July:	1822
August:	5769
September:	3794
October:	750
November:	364
December:	319

2007

January:	412
February:	890
March:	524
April:	339
May:	286
June:	279
July:	193
August:	105
September:	159
October (10/17)	138

REFUGEES WILL FLOOD IF WAR BREAKS OUT IN THE NORTH

13. (SBU) OfERR founder-treasurer S.C. Chandrahasan told Post that the situation will dramatically change if the government of Sri Lanka attacks the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

in the north of the country. He said that up to 50,000 refugees could land in Tamil Nadu within two to three months under such circumstances. Chandrahasan was certain that Tamil Nadu's refugee camps could easily absorb the additional numbers. But journalists pointed out that such a situation could be politically difficult for Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK. News of a military attack in northern Sri Lanka coupled with a flood of refugees will likely stimulate sentiment in favor of Sri Lankan Tamils, leading to calls for the DMK use its influence as a member of the ruling UPA to have India pressure Sri Lanka to halt its offensive. Regardless of the government of India's response, Tamil Nadu's opposition parties would no doubt demand that the DMK explain why it could not do more to stop the suffering of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

REFUGEE ADVOCATES APPRECIATE USG INITIATIVE

¶4. (SBU) Chandrahasan expressed great appreciation for the recent invitation for proposals for U.S. assistance funds to improve conditions at the Sri Lankan refugee camps. He pointed out that water and sanitation are priority needs. He also urged the United States to be sensitive to the need to consider the overall local environment when evaluating the conditions in the camps. The refugee camps are often located amidst impoverished Indian communities. It is important, he said, not to squander the goodwill of Indian host communities by conspicuously widening the gap between the living conditions of the refugees and those of the poor Indian villagers in surrounding communities.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Heightened monitoring by both the Indian and Sri Lankan navies and the threat of impounding traffickers' boats have limited the flow of refugees to Tamil Nadu. Despite these curbs, we will likely see a flood of refugees if the Sri Lankan army goes on the offensive in the north. The refugee camps, civil society, and

CHENNAI 00000654 002 OF 002

Tamil Nadu's bureaucratic machinery can handle a heavy influx of refugees. But such a flood will cause pressure to build on the DMK party to influence the UPA government in New Delhi to engage Sri Lanka. END COMMENT.

¶6. This message was coordinated with Embassy New Delhi.

KAPLAN